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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6321
INFO RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 5139
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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0515
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA PRIORITY 0032
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000324

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR CA/OCS/ACS/NESA, CA/OCS/CI
LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR WALLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2019
TAGS: [CASC](#) [KOCI](#) [KJUS](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [MURAD](#) [MAYA](#) [AND](#) [OMAR](#)
SUBJECT: MURAD CUSTODY CASE: CONSUL GENERAL PRESENTS
BACKGROUND TO SYRIAN DIRECTOR OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS

REF: DAMASCUS 00245

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Consul General met with the Syrian Director of Consular Affairs Haitham Maashfejj on May 5, in order to provide him with additional information about the Murad child custody case. Director Maashfejj was given a copy of the diplomatic note and supporting background information. The note reiterated the USG's request for assistance from the SARG on locating the Murad children and reuniting them with their mother. The Consul General also reminded Maashfejj that Acting Assistant Secretary Jeffrey Feltman had raised the case with Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallim in the past and would probably do so again on May 7, adding he hoped Maashfejj would brief the FM on the meeting so that the FM would be made aware of the case. Maashfejj received the information and promised he would share it with the relevant officials and that he would provide us with an update if/when they learned something about the case. END SUMMARY.

Following Feltman's Initiative

¶2. (SBU) The Consul General met with Director of Consular Affairs Haitham Maashfejj on May 5, in a follow-up to a March 26 meeting between Maashfejj, Charged d'Affaires, the Consul General (ref A). Post had sought the March 26 meeting to follow up on A A/S Feltman's query to FM Muallim on March 7. Muallim had told Feltman he was unfamiliar with the Murad case before and asked for more information. The Embassy took Muallim's request as an opportunity to meet with Maashfejj and provide documents showing the history of our appeals to the SARG for assistance.

The Dipnote and Supporting Documents

¶3. (SBU) The Consul General presented Maashfejj with a copy of a diplomatic note that requested SARG aid in the case and additional supporting documents describing the history of the Murad case. The supporting documents and the diplomatic note, the Consul General explained, detailed USG efforts on behalf of the Murad family dating back to 2001 and included (1) a letter from 2007 signed by 16 Senators, including then-Senators Barack Obama and Joseph Biden, asking President Asad to assist in locating the Murad children and returning them to their mother; (2) a chronology of letters sent to the offices of the President and the Foreign Minister requesting

SARG action on the case; (3) information on rulings by Lebanese and U.S. courts, including a judgment rendered under Sunni Sharia law, that granted Ms. Murad full custody of the two children; (4) the last known information on the children's U.S. and Lebanese passports; and (5) the GOL statement that the two children and their father had crossed from Lebanon into Syria in November 2001.

Media Concerns

14. (C) After reviewing the contents of the diplomatic note and supporting documents, the Consul General reiterated the USG's appeal to the SARG for support in returning the two children to their mother. Ms. Murad, the Consul General noted, had not gone to the U.S. press recently on this issue.

Were she to do so in the future, he said, the case could attract a lot of attention in the press, adding that "she could say the USG had asked the Syrians for help in locating the children for a long time. If something like that happened, I don't see how it would help the situation as we try to improve bilateral relations." The Consul General reminded Maashfejj of their previous conversation with the Charge in which they had said getting the Murad case "off the table" would be viewed positively by the USG.

Maashfejj Noncommittal

15. (SBU) Maashfejj, for his part, had little to say during the

meeting. Following the explanation of the diplomatic note, he asked, "What was the response from officials in the past when you brought this up? I'm not familiar with the case." The Consul General responded, "On some occasions, the government officials said 'thank you' for the information and then never replied to us; other times they asked for more information, but no action resulted. President Asad had said he would look into it and 'assist where he could,' but we are unaware of any action on his part."

16. (C) Maashfejj assured us he would be certain to send the information to those authorities who might help us and that he would respond to us at some point in the future. The Consul General asked Maashfejj to brief the FM prior to the FM's May 7 meeting with Feltman. He also told Maashfejj that it was certain the U.S. would pursue the case until it was resolved. The problem, Maashfejj replied, was that the children were Lebanese citizens. "If they were Syrian, we could locate them easily, but this (their Lebanese citizenship) will make it difficult." The Consul General quickly reminded Maashfejj that the children were U.S. citizens as well and that citizenship was the most important in our view.

17. (C) COMMENT: Despite Muallim's apparent lack of recollection, the Embassy has raised the issue with him in the past. The SARG's lack of response on this case has been longstanding and we can only speculate as to their reasons.
END COMMENT.
CONNELLY